

Friday 18 June, 2021

**To everyone in Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire (BNSSG),**

We want to share a big thank you for continuing to do everything you can to protect yourselves and your loved ones from Covid-19, as the four week extension to lockdown restrictions is announced. We know that the extension will mean different things to different people, but hope that as a community we can all take measures to keep one another safe.

The Delta variant of the virus is now the dominant strain in our area, and the best way to respond to this change and protect one another is by:

- **Getting vaccinated as soon as you can.** We are now offering first dose vaccination appointments to everyone over the age of 18. People over 40 who had their first dose at least 8 weeks ago will soon be able to bring forward their existing appointment from 12 weeks. You can do this directly via the [National Booking System](#) or your GP practice will be in touch. Find out more on our [website](#), the [National Booking System](#) or by calling 119.
- **Continuing to follow the 'Hands, Face, Space' guidance** – washing your hands regularly, wearing a face covering and observing social distancing.
- **Getting the right Covid test at the right time.** Take your twice-weekly rapid Covid-19 tests and report your results. You can [take your free tests at work, school, home or at an assisted testing site](#) in Bristol, North Somerset or South Gloucestershire. If you have symptoms of coronavirus you must self-isolate and book a symptomatic test straightaway at [www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test](http://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test) or by calling 119.

As restrictions have lifted, health and care services across our area have become busier. This includes in General Practice, where doctors and practice teams continue to vaccinate thousands of people each week alongside their ordinary work in our communities. Our hospitals and minor injury units are also busier, making it even more important to 'choose well' and use the right service for your needs. This includes:

- **Speaking to your pharmacist** about very minor summer ailments such as hayfever, coughs or colds.
- **Consulting your GP** about health concerns or conditions that won't go away (GPs continue to provide face to face appointments, as well as offering phone and video consultations).
- **Clicking or calling NHS 111 first** if you think you need A&E. The 111 service offers immediate medical advice and if you need urgent help, they can book you into the right service for your needs (please continue to only use A&E or call 999 in the event of serious and life-threatening emergencies).

Thank you for continuing to help us help you – including by treating our hardworking health and care staff with kindness and respect as services become busier. The next page of this letter highlights the further support available to you, including resources for mental health and wellbeing.

**Thank you – on behalf of the Executives in Healthier Together**

**Thank you for all you've done so far. Here's how to continue helping us, to help you:**

- Your mental health and wellbeing is important, and there is support available for you locally:
  - The VITA 24/7 helpline can help you with emotional support. The line connects you with a mental health counsellor and relevant groups in your local area. Call 0800 012 6549 (textphone users should dial 18001 followed by 0800 0126549). Translators are available.
  - The AWP Mental Health 24/7 response line is there for adults or children under the care of AWP and worried about their own or someone else's mental health: 0300 303 1320
  - SilverCloud is a [free online platform](#) offering valuable mental health and wellbeing support.
  - Bump2baby wellbeing helps you find the right support during pregnancy, birth and beyond: [bump2babywellbeingguide.org](http://bump2babywellbeingguide.org)
- Shielding has now ended. If you have a medical condition which makes you clinically extremely vulnerable to coronavirus and were asked to shield, there is [online guidance available on how to stay safe](#)
- If you still feel you require support, please get in touch with your local authority using the contact details below. You can also contact them if you have any other questions or concerns:
  - Bristol: We are Bristol: 0800 694 0184
  - North Somerset: North Somerset Together: 01934 427 437
  - South Gloucestershire: 0800 953 7778
- If you are receiving care in your home, including district nurses, therapists and support workers, and need to discuss your needs, please call: 0300 125 6789.
- Remember: if you are experiencing domestic abuse, household isolation rules do not apply. You are allowed to leave your home and NextLink can provide support and accommodation. Call 0800 4700 280 (24/7) or go to: [www.nextlinkhousing.co.uk](http://www.nextlinkhousing.co.uk)

**Healthier Together: who we are**

Healthier Together is the Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire (BNSSG) Integrated Care System (ICS) which represents ten partner organisations shaping the future of local health and care services.

Further information is available on our website: [www.bnssghealthiertogether.org.uk](http://www.bnssghealthiertogether.org.uk)